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THE WALCOUNTIANS CLUB: REALLY MAKING THEIR EPOS COUNT!

10 years ago Monty Montgomery, the general manager of the Walcountians Sports Club, made a decision to change the single 'stand alone' till to a fully integrated electronic point of sale (EPoS) and membership system. This decision was based on their wanting to issue membership cards, helping to both manage the membership and give all their card carrying members a discount at the clubhouse's bars.

Having then decided to purchase and install a system from Open Solutions, Monty also saw a major advantage in a special feature of the EPoS package: a full stock control system. Used properly, it would help the club to reduce what were then two or three visits a year at £180 a visit and give the club's managers immediate feedback on stock movements.

What follows is a brief outline of the club's experience with the Open Solutions' EPoS and membership cards system and why Monty believes every club should have one.

The Walcountians Sports Club, and the Old Walcountians Rugby Football Club

The sports club was originally built by the ex-pupils of Wallington County Grammar School and their friends as a clubhouse for the Old Walcountians' Rugby Football Club. It was officially opened on the 19th September 1965 by Air Marshal Sir Augustus Walker KCB CBE DSO DFC AFC, then president of the English Rugby Football Union.

Since then the clubhouse and its associated 42 acres of playing fields have gone through many phases of development and improvement, the most recent being an extension and a new roof in 2014. It has taken on new sports and become the Walcountians Sports Club, with the Old Walcountians RFC now being a major part of the main club.

Five sorts of sports, modern clubhouse and facilities

It's now one of the largest multi sports clubs in Surrey with hockey, lacrosse, Junior, Adult and Veterans' football, cricket and rugby all played by a large and enthusiastic following, especially for sports that can use the updated astroturf pitch.

There's a modern clubhouse with a large and fully licenced bar, and a large fully equipped function hall that leads onto a large patio and BBQ area, that can seat up to 80 people for parties and similar events and functions, and with an adjourning snug bar and TV area.

As a multi-sports club, membership of each sport is managed separately by those in charge of each sport. In Monty's experience, for some the bar and drinking at the club is all part of the culture of their sport, and rugby is typical in this respect. The rugby playing members form around 20% of the overall membership of the multi-sports club.

Membership cards, positive cash flow

Unlike the approach in golf clubs that usually make annual amounts on the members' bar cards mandatory, when it was originally installed the club preferred to let their members place money on their cards whenever and however much they wanted.

The net impact on the club's cash flow has always been positive, a benefit Monty as the club's manager particularly appreciates. With rugby and other sports being winter and spring games and cricket being a summer one, the positive impact on the club's cash flow is all year round.

The benefit of 'tabs'

Another major advantage of the Open Solutions EPoS system is the ease with which tabs can be set up for any group, party or table at any event. But while always useful for weddings and similar celebratory functions, Monty's taken this tab feature to new heights.

Indeed, as they're having a major Mixed hockey festival this weekend (August 11th and 12th 2018) with no less than 48 teams entered and competing, Monty's arranged matters so that a collective tab can be set up for each team, enabling team members to have a whip round money-wise. Then thanks to Monty a team's drinks can be placed and ordered through the one card, making things much easier for all concerned.

The changing habits of the cashless society

The card-using members are as Monty puts it: "Almost religious in their use of their cards, as this is how they a) get their discount and because b) how everyone's paying for anything these days."

Over the past decade of the EPoS system's operation, Monty's seen massive changes in non-cash handling at the club due to the impact of cards and especially mobile technology: "Nowadays none of the smartphone carrying younger generation, ie. our Juniors and U18s, and of course the 20- and 30-somethings, pay for anything using cash. They simply don't carry cash, but they do expect retailers to accept and facilitate their iPhone to pay for things!"

"So we made sure we had an up to date contactless PDQ machine to take both members' cards and the smartphones with features like ApplePay. Ironically, this also enables them to add an extra amount, so that they've got enough cash to buy club items that can only be paid for with cash!"

Stock control: making it count and keeping things up to date

In terms of the stock control, Monty's always liked this feature and it was one of the first things following a change of bar staff that he got training on himself from Open Solutions.

Monty comments: "It was very easy and straightforward, especially when the support engineer at the other end of the phone can go into our system and show men how to make changes. It's a very good stock control system on this EPoS and I make sure that we use it to the maximum. It's a great bar management tool."

"One of the things we always have to keep an eye on is the changes that the suppliers keep on making, eg. to the bottle sizes which may go from 300ml to 275ml or vice versa, or the crate sizes from 12 bottles to a crate down

to six. Things can quickly go out of kilter if the incorrect sizes or quantities aren't amended within our stock control system!"

Promotions, installation and training

In terms of promotions, Monty doesn't do anything special apart from Happy Hours: "All we have to do is set up the two sets of prices with Button A and Button B, so when we run a Happy Hour, all the bar manager has to do is press Button B with a built in discount across the range of drinks products."

While it was a long time ago, Monty recalls that even then, the installation was very quick, a day or so, plus the training, an added factor he hadn't been expecting. "It makes all the difference for the staff to get properly trained and comfortable with using our EPoS system, and that still applies today with temporary staff. Our EPoS came with very good training, and we find it's pretty easy to train up temporary staff as well, as and when required."

He adds: "Setting up product pages was also easy, and in fact it's the flexibility I really like. For example, chocolate and sweets: we started to find we were building pages that were getting too complex, so we reduced the stock and the screen pages down to a couple of buttons and prices."

"But on the other hand, this new trend for drinking all kinds of different types of gin has meant that instead of one product button on the spirits screen for gin as it used to be, well, we may have got a bit over-enthusiastic: we've now got 27 different gins on one page!"

Support: just a button away

Monty's a fan of the support he has always had from Open Solutions, saying: "It's excellent, and it's always been excellent. I particularly like it when one of their engineers can take over your PC or laptop screen while you're sitting there, and you can watch what they're doing."

"I find that much more efficient as a learning process than trying to follow what, to be fair, is a very comprehensive manual. That comes with the package. In fact quite recently, Rob Payne, the support team leader put a new icon our system called TeamView, so now all I have to do when I need them to come and take over my screen is to click the TeamView button."

Would you recommend this EPoS software to other clubs?

"Yes, absolutely. It's made life much easier for us, and for managing what is now a much larger Walcountians Sports Club."

He summarises: "It's not just the EPoS system, it's the whole Open Solutions package: the touch screens tills, the membership cards, all the things we can do to manage our pricing and margins, the accuracy of the stock control, the support whenever we need it – the whole offering is very well thought through, and makes managing a large club like this a much more straightforward task."